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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 001450

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/27/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [IT](#) [EUN](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIA: ITALY AGREES ON NEED TO MAINTAIN PRESSURE

REF: STATE 78006

Classified By: Pol MC Tom Countryman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request. Please see paragraph 4.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary. A mid-level Italian MFA official shares our view that we need to continue to maintain pressure on Syria on full compliance with UNSCR 1559. At the same time, Italy still prefers engagement and the MFA is contemplating an Under Secretary level visit to Damascus in mid-May. End summary.

[1](#)3. (C) Pol MC contacted MFA Office Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Luca Ferrari on April 28 to discuss reftel demarche. Ferrari said he realized that Washington is not enthusiastic about a Shara'a visit to Rome or a Fini visit to Damascus, but reiterated Italy's position that it is still important to engage with the Syrians, especially if the message is compatible with the US position. Ferrari said U/S for the Middle East and Africa Alfredo Mantica plans to travel to Lebanon the second week in May to meet with opposition members, where he will "deliver the right message." Ferrari asked, however, whether Washington would object if Mantica continued on to Damascus, where his message would be threefold: 1) the need for Syrian intelligence also to vacate Lebanon; 2) the need for transparent parliamentary elections in Lebanon free from Syrian interference; and 3) the lack of any hope of signing the EU Association Agreement in the near future if Syria does not address the issues under UNSC 1559.

[1](#)4. (C) Pol MC responded that we would get a definitive answer from the Department, but that Washington might be less concerned about a visit at this level, especially if it is accompanied by the strong message in our demarche. Ferrari, who was about to depart for Paris where he will participate in a meeting with Special Envoy Wolfensohn and other Department officials on Gaza withdrawal, agreed that we would revisit the issue upon his return next week. Post will send septel with further details. In the meantime, we ask that Department provide Washington's reaction to the proposed visit, as outlined above, of U/S Mantica to Syria.

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